The Perfect Pearl

Introduction: The pearl has long been valued for its rarity and beauty. However, in today’s society, many consider the diamond to be the most beautiful and valuable gemstone. Would our attitudes about the pearl change if we learned more about their formation and their history? Follow this webquest to research the unique beauty of the pearl and its importance to economies worldwide.

Websites: Answer the following questions about pearls by viewing these websites. At the completion of the webquest, you will design a top ten list about pearls based upon your group’s ideas.

**American Museum of Natural History: Pearls**  
<http://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/pearls/>

The American Museum of Natural History in New York offers this extensive Internet resource on pearls as a companion site to a recent exhibit. From finding pearls to fashioning them into exquisite pieces of jewelry, this site is a compendium of interesting information and intoxicating imagery.

**Imperial-Deltah Visitors Guide to Pearls**  
<http://www.imperial-deltah.com/visitors/visitorsguidetopearls/vistorsguide.htm>

What makes some pearls more valuable than others? Where do the many different kinds of pearls come from? What factors contribute to a pearl's color and luster? You'll find answers to these and scores of other frequently asked questions about pearls at this site.

**Mikimoto**   
<http://www.mikimoto.com/>

The Web site of K. Mikimoto & Co. Ltd., the first company to create cultured pearls in the late 19th century, is a feast for the eyes. Take a quiz on pearls, learn more about the history of human adornment with pearls, and browse a gallery some of the world's most prized pearl jewelry.

**United States Geological Survey**  
<http://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/commodity/gemstones/sp14-95/pearls.html>

This government site provides details on the current status of freshwater pearl harvesting and the production of cultured pearls in U.S. waters. Those interested will also find a general history of pearls in America, dating all the way back to the time of Pocahontas.

**What’s Killing The Oysters**

[**http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/pearl/oysters.html**](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/pearl/oysters.html)

Since 1996, something has been killing the *akoya* oysters off the coast of Japan. With the cultured pearl industry at risk, can scientists solve the mystery in time?

**The History of Pearls**

[**http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/pearl/time.html**](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/pearl/time.html)

Pearls were the most precious gem to several famous ancient cultures. Do you know your pearl history?

Individual Questions: Answer these questions in detail:

1. How is a pearl made naturally?

2. Can just any mollusk make a pearl? Or do specific types make pearls?

3. What are some factors that would affect the price of a pearl?

4. Are all pearls made completely by nature today?

5. How many kinds of pearls did you find on these websites (color, shape)? What affects the color and shape of a pearl?

6. How do farmers get the pearl out of the mollusk?

7. How are pearls fashioned into jewelry?

8. Summarize the history of pearls in four paragraphs.

9. The pearl industry is located all over the world. List 6 of these countries.

10. Is the pearl the only gem made by an animal? Explain.

11. Is the pearl the oldest naturally occurring gemstone in the United States? Explain.

12. What are the challenges facing the cultured pearl industry in Japan?

13. What are the suggested solutions for solving these challenges in Japan?

14. Did your attitude toward the beauty and importance of the pearl change after this webquest? Why or why not?

**Group Activity:** Discuss the answers that you obtained from your questions. Make a top ten list that shows the ten most important things that you learned about pearls. Your group will not have the same answers as another and that is okay! Be prepared to briefly present your list to the class and defend why your group chose your particular top ten facts.

**Conclusions:** As a class, we will discuss the importance of the pearl. Did our attitudes change about the pearl? What would the world be like without pearls? Would history change if pearls had never been made or discovered?